

LE CHRISTIANISME ECLATE, by Michel de Certeau and Jean-Marie Domenach. *Seuil*, Paris, 1974. 123 pp. 13F.

This book contains the transcript of a radio conversation between Jean-Marie Domenach, editor of the lay Catholic monthly *Esprit*, and Michel de Certeau, the Jesuit theologian and historian of spirituality. It is followed by some discussion with the studio audience and then each author develops further themes he could only sketch orally.

A lurid picture emerges of French Catholicism as 'Christianity exploded'. The Catholic Church in France has apparently forfeited all credibility as arbiter of truth and right; ecclesiastics are trotted out on television to opine on the same basis as the representatives of any other pressure group or subculture, only more exotic than most. This *folklorisation* of the clergy—what a gift the French have for *le mot juste*—is symptomatic of an aestheticisation of Christianity which also signals increasing scepticism about the Church as an institution mediating 'God': 'Does the silence that speaks in us of the absolutely other require, in order to affect our lives, that it should be publicly anticipated, proclaimed, legislated for and organised by the ecclesiastical institution?' In fact the deeper one's faith the less likely one is to be a practising Catholic; the sacrament machine only alienates the committed believer.

Supposing, then, that this picture is right (and some members of the studio audience clearly felt it was an exaggeration), what future is there

for Christianity? According to Michel de Certeau, what survives is a multiple practice, a variety of ways of behaving, few with any clearly Christian status, 'some waiting for a language, others requiring none'. This all but anonymous current in the general movement of life would nevertheless bear witness to a certain *silence*. Just as a church is 'empty' compared with the houses around it, the word 'God' is a blank in the space of language, *un principe d'évidement*, a blank in the sign-saturated universe which continues to demand and create a variety of analogous intervals. Such 'breaks', whether architectural, physiological or linguistic, intimate a silence which Christians, after all the dogmatic eloquence they have been accustomed to have resonating round them, may at first find alarming, but which may eventually generate a meaning, more modest and more ordinary, which would be all the truer for being so much more reserved.

The disintegration of institutional Christianity as we have known it would thus only be an epoch in the history of the meaning of silence. For a historian of spirituality as steeped in the documents of seventeenth-century mysticism as Michel de Certeau is, but who is familiar also with post-metaphysical philosophy of meaning such as is practised by Emmanuel Lévinas, the prospect is not daunting but liberating.

FERGUS KERR OP

CATHOLICS, PEASANTS & CHEWA RESISTANCE IN NYASALAND 1889-1939, by Ian Linden. *Heinemann*, London, 1974. 223 pp. £6.

Colonialism is sometimes portrayed as a monster with three powerful arms: the colonial administration itself, the business interests of Europeans, and the Christian Church. Linden dissects one part of the third arm, the progress of Catholicism in Nyasaland, as it then was, from 1889 to 1939.

When the White Fathers and Montfort Fathers arrived in the early 1890s, Protestant missionary work was already so well entrenched that the Catholics were billed as intruders, a sect alongside the Established church. They soon gained respectability, however, since it was from the Protestant ranks that the independent churches seceded and from Protestant emphasis on individual interpretation of the Bible that the 'rebels' took their cue. Bishop Auneau of the Montfort Fathers notes the choice remark: "Ah, exclaimed a Protestant one day, "if they were all Catholics we would not have any revolts to worry about" (quoted p. 87). Although both Catholic and Protestant missionaries provided secular education as a means of evangelising, the Catholics' failure to provide high-quality

secondary education meant that the élite which emerged in the 1930s was almost entirely Protestant. The Catholic preoccupation with training for entry to religious orders had good results where women were concerned but few men resisted the attraction of a job in the colonial administration to embrace celibacy and the rigorous training required for the priesthood. The last chapter, a detailed profile of one particular mission station, provides evidence for Linden's claim that although 'ambitious men were forced to make a choice between mission and village or the escape to the towns and mines . . . for the majority of Christians it was not a question of either/or, rather of and/and. Christian practice did not replace Chewa culture but grew up alongside it. . . . Villagers would attend mass but they also might participate in nyau dances; a girl might receive her first communion in white dress after detailed instruction and later secretly undergo *chinamwali* to ensure that she got a husband' (p. 203).

In the preface Linden justifies his choice of subject and adds: 'A historian studying the

Catholic missions is obliged to concentrate on a peasant Church whose essential conservatism calls in question, or at least balances, the élitist slant of the Protestant mission histories' (p. x). My only serious criticism of this fascinating book is that Linden makes too much of the possible link between a missionary's own social and cultural background and the church which emerges under his guidance. The 'formula' suggested for Nyasaland is that Catholic peasant missionaries produced a church of Catholic peasants and Protestant élitist missionaries produced a church of élite Protestants. So, for example, we are told that 'the ahistorical Christianity which African Catholics learnt was a natural product of missionaries who were in a sense themselves escaping from history in Europe. The priests in Nyasaland were largely the children of Europe's *émigrés de l'intérieur*' (p. 88). Speaking of Auneau's 'peasant aggressiveness', Linden reminds us that there was 'a tradition of Catholic armed resistance to the Republic among the 'chouans' in the Vendée where Auneau had grown up, and many of the Montforts came from anti-republican Brittany' (p. 89). And it is said, of the early Catholic missionaries, that 'the Church they produced in Nyasaland was a

remarkable replica of the one they left behind in Limburg, Quebec, or Brittany; it was profoundly conservative and made up largely of peasants' (p. 208). But will this do? If a 'functionalist' explanation really is required for the character of Catholicism in Nyasaland, it seems more important to stress that the Catholic missionaries were outsiders, foreigners in an area of British influence, that most of them spoke little English and could therefore not teach it, and that they arrived late to find that the Protestants had already won the allegiance of the 'progressive' chiefs. In Rwanda and Burundi, areas of Belgian influence, the reverse happened. The British and American missionaries arrived late, received little support from the Catholic authorities, could not speak French, and found that Catholic missionaries had established a monopoly of 'élitist' education. Many of these 'élitist' Catholic missionaries came from the same conservative background as the 'peasant' missionaries of Nyasaland.

Finally, two complaints. It would have helped to have a clear, comprehensive map of South-East Africa at the front of the book. Secondly, £6 seems a lot to charge for 180 pages—which is all that is left after deducting the prefaces, footnotes and index. JEREMY GREENLAND

THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE, by Anders Jeffner. *SCM Press Ltd.*, London, 1972. 135 pp. £2.25.

MYTHS, MODELS AND PARADIGMS, The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language, by Ian G. Barbour. *SCM Press Ltd.*, London, 1974. 198 pp. £2.95.

THE MEANING OF GOD, by Robert H. King. *S.C.M. Press Ltd.*, London, 1974. 166 pp. £2.50.

A THEOLOGY OF SPEECH. An Essay in Philosophical Theology, by Ian Davie. *Sheed and Ward*, London, 1973. 114 pp. £2.50.

These four books form only a small selection of an evergrowing flood of studies in philosophical theology, all covering more or less the same ground, grinding at the same argument that has now dominated the discussion for some time. In our secularised society the issue is no longer to demonstrate God's reality from given data in this world, but to show that, while we are involved with the things in this world, there is still room for religious convictions. Can mankind go on expressing hopes and expectations that concern a dimension beyond this world: does religious language make sense?

Modern insights into the multiform structure of language extending itself to various domains of life have freed us from positivist and empiricist dogmatism that makes verification the only criterion of meaningfulness. The meaning of religion does not depend on metaphysics and its fruitless dispute with the positivist sceptics, but is to be found within the domain of religious language itself, we are

assured. But having said this, many questions remain, especially with respect to the objective value of religious statements that cannot be reduced to mere expressions of sentiments or primitive forms of a scientific understanding of the world. Jeffner argues that the criterion of religious speech is not to be sought in its relation to the world as such, but in its connection with a religious situation. Indeed, in these days many religious statements have become problematic: the statement 'God created the world' is no longer evident in view of modern science. Many philosophers have therefore tried to reconstruct their function so that they can be incorporated in a modern view of the world. But such a reconstruction falls victim to the very challenge which it tries to meet. The meaningfulness of religious language depends on its right to make statements about what is the case, and it is only on that condition that the other, more emotive functions of religious language make sense. The author then interprets 'problema-